

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM J. PERRY
REMARKS AT PRESS AVAILABILITY, WITH NATO SECRETARY GENERAL WILLY CLAES
NATO HEADQUARTERS, BRUSSELS, BELGIUM
DECEMBER 13, 1994

SECRETARY GENERAL CLAES: Ladies and gentlemen, I have had the honor to have a long meeting with Defense Secretary Perry. We have had the opportunity, of course, to discuss a little bit the different items being at the agenda tomorrow. We have discussed especially, of course, the difficulties we are facing in Bosnia and the implementation of our very extended program Partnership for Peace, questions of enlargement.

I have had the opportunity to explain to Secretary Perry the conditions in which we are preparing the withdrawal of Bosnia. Once again, NATO is not asking for a withdrawal. We are just preparing a scenario of withdrawal in a hostile environment, but once again, and I insist, we don't believe that this would be the best solution. I had the opportunity to thank President Clinton and the government of the USA for its willingness to help in case where we should be obliged to implement such a scenario. It indicates very clearly that there is a real feeling of solidarity in NATO, and once again, it's my duty to say thanks to the government of the U.S., so I've spoken much because we have the opportunity tomorrow to meet the Secretary.

SECRETARY PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Secretary General. We did have a very good discussion tonight. I emphasized that the United States believes that UNPROFOR is performing a very valuable function in Bosnia in terms of delivering humanitarian aid and in terms of lowering the level of violence which is going on in that country. Therefore, the United States hopes that UNPROFOR will remain in Bosnia.

Having said that, if for whatever reason UNPROFOR decides to leave, then we did discuss the role that NATO might play in assisting in that withdrawal. I made two points. The first was that, in such a withdrawal, that NATO should be the command and control. There should be a unitary command under NATO, and secondly, under those conditions, the United States would be willing to fully participate in the withdrawal operation.

We also discussed the discussions at the ministerial meeting earlier this month about beginning the process for the expansion of NATO. I want to emphasize that we're talking about a process, not decisions made about the expansion of NATO. Most of our actions relative to that in the next day or so will be focused on the Partnership for Peace, which is a reality, an ongoing reality and the importance of moving forward on Partnership for Peace and providing adequate planning and adequate funding for it.

With that, perhaps the Secretary General and I would be able to take a question or two.

Q: Charlie Aldinger with Reuters. I might ask you that the British, the French and the Americans seem to be insisting that their own troops should stay in Bosnia and be made more effective. Would you agree that the momentum is shifting toward keeping the troops in Bosnia? And how could NATO help make them more effective, rather than help them withdraw?

SECRETARY GENERAL CLAES: Well, I think that I have been clear. There is no political willingness for withdrawal in NATO. Let this be clear. But just doing the job, the mandate, given in order to prepare the scenario, no more than that. We are ready to help every effort of improvement, but it's not up to us. It's very simple to do this. But I need some U.N. responsables ready to turn some keys, if you understand what I mean.

Q: Well, did you--would you elaborate on that? How do you mean, "ready to turn some keys"? You talking about....

SECRETARY GENERAL CLAES: Well, I'm not responsible for the U.N. I'm just waiting for some requests. For example--as for example, today I've seen that the UNPROFOR spokesman said that a request was sent to NATO for close air support in Bihac after the incident yesterday. Sorry. There's never been one request. Let that be clear. So I'm asking just for a request. We are ready, as always.

NATO SPOKESMAN: Thank you, Charles. Next (inaudible).

Q: To both gentlemen, please. James Robbins from the BBC. Picking up on what the Secretary General has just said about the incident and the death of a Bangladeshi soldier in a very serious attack on an armored vehicle, are both of you dismayed that there hasn't been a formal request for air power, because this seems to raise further public doubts about the effectiveness of NATO and the effectiveness--determination of the international community to support UNPROFOR in Bosnia?

SECRETARY PERRY: This incident should raise no doubts about the effectiveness of NATO. NATO is prepared to take close air support and air strike action as requested by the UNPROFOR.

SECRETARY GENERAL CLAES: Same answer.

Q: But the only thing that's preventing you is a lack of a request.

SECRETARY PERRY: It's a dual-key operation. NATO replies to requests from the U.N. forces in Bosnia for air strikes. We have no authority to unilaterally conduct air strikes.

NATO SPOKESMAN: Thank you. Another question, from you, sir, please (inaudible).

Q: Michael Gordon, New York Times. Mr. Secretary General, some very specific suggestions have been made to make UNPROFOR more effective. As a military proposition, I understand the United Nations has to turn its key. Do you endorse ideas to open a so-called "blue route" from Split to Sarajevo, or to take steps to make the Sarajevo airport more secure? And perhaps reposition the UNPROFOR troops in Bosnia so as to

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make their positions more defensible. Do you think these are worth suggestions to be pursued if the U.N. could be persuaded to pursue them?

SECRETARY GENERAL CLAES: Well, the job of course, to the generals who are responsible for the UNPROFOR to take decisions in that field. But, personally, I think that these are very constructive suggestions. And if there is a request in order to help them to implement those suggestions, why not? We are ready to examine this.

NATO SPOKESMAN: Thank you very much indeed.

END

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Perry Presses NATO on French Plan to Boost U.N. in Bosnia

Briton Rebuffs Proposal to Create Safe Corridor to Sarajevo, Protect Airport, Consolidate Peacekeepers

By Bradley Graham
Washington Post Staff Writer

BRUSSELS, Dec. 13—Britain's defense minister declined today to endorse military measures proposed by France and backed by the United States to strengthen U.N. peacekeeping operations in Bosnia.

Defense Minister Malcolm Rifkind said the proposals—to establish a secure corridor between Sarajevo and the Adriatic Sea, improve protection around Sarajevo airport and consolidate U.N. forces into more defensible positions—needed further study. His cool reaction handicapped efforts here by Defense Secretary William J. Perry to rally NATO support for the steps.

With international peacekeepers facing increased interference and outright attack from Bosnian Serbs, allied officials have acknowledged a need to rethink the structure and methods of the U.N. force and adopt measures that would reduce the vulnerability and enhance the effectiveness of the troops. But while the United States and France were hoping NATO could take the lead in this process, Rifkind told U.S. officials he would prefer the initiative to come from the United Nations, and he sought today to lower expectations about quick, new military action.

"Any idea has to be analyzed," Rifkind told reporters after meeting with Perry at NATO headquarters. "You don't just announce an idea. You have to have it studied to see what the implications are."

Strains between NATO and the United Nations over how to respond to Bosnian Serb aggression flared again today when NATO's top

civilian official, Secretary General Willy Claes, took issue with a suggestion that the alliance had balked this week at launching an airstrike against Serb targets around the besieged Muslim enclave of Bihac.

Serb shelling Monday of a U.N. armored personnel carrier in Bihac injured four Bangladeshi peacekeepers and fatally wounded a fifth. The local Bangladeshi commander asked for NATO air support, but the request never was forwarded by more senior U.N. officers in Sarajevo and Zagreb, who worried that the presence of Serb surface-to-air missiles around Bihac posed too great a threat to allied planes, according to news agency reports from the region.

"There's never been one request" for Bihac this week, Claes, standing next to Perry, told reporters at a news conference here. "So I'm asking just for a request. We are ready, as always."

The repeated inability of U.N. peacekeeping troops to deal with Serb aggression—now more frequently aimed at the peacekeepers—prompted France last week to warn that it was considering ending its participation in the force. But by the weekend, the French had reversed course, pledging to stay on. In Washington on Monday, French Defense Minister Francois Leotard discussed with Perry the proposals to bolster the U.N. force.

U.S. officials attributed the turnaround to the recognition that the consequences of a pullout—humanitarian disaster, wider war, damaged U.N. and NATO credibility—would be potentially worse than the risks of remaining in Bosnia. While en route to Brussels earlier today, Perry said he recognized the difficul-

ty of persuading other European defense ministers to support the tougher measures suggested by France.

"None of these ideas is a very attractive idea or easy to implement," Perry said. "It's just that the alternatives are so unattractive."

After Perry's meeting with Rifkind, a senior defense official who briefed reporters said that although the Europeans are once again committed to staying in Bosnia and agree on the need to improve the effectiveness of the U.N. force, reaching a consensus on specifics will take some time.

"We did not come here expecting to—by Thursday, when the secretary leaves—have an agreement on the reconstruction of" the U.N. Protection Force in Bosnia, said the official. "I mean, this has been a problem that has been with us for some time, and it's not going to be solved overnight."

Perry stressed that the aim of the latest deliberations by the alliance is not to turn the U.N. peacekeepers into a combat force.

"We're not talking about converting UNPROFOR into a combatant force to fight a war," the secretary told reporters traveling with him. "I'm talking about making them more effective to the mandate they already have, which is delivery of humanitarian aid and for limiting the levels of violence."

The idea of establishing a fortified ground corridor from the Adriatic port of Split to Sarajevo and other cities in central Bosnia was first considered last year, but fighting between Muslims and Croats made it unfeasible. Since then, the two groups have formed a federation, making the proposal appear more practical.

For its part, the United States could provide air power to help protect U.N. relief convoys—a move that Perry said today would require "neutralizing" surface-to-air missile sites that Bosnian Serbs have activated recently.

To improve security around Sarajevo airport, allied officials are considering rearranging U.N. forces in the area. The French also have proposed shifting U.N. forces throughout Bosnia into more defensible positions.

Perry said the consolidation of U.N. troops would not mean relinquishing protection of any of the six U.N.-declared "safe areas" for Muslims but could involve eliminating the numerous clusters of 15 to 20 peacekeepers dispersed in central Bosnia to guard weapons collection sites and other locations.

Perry told reporters traveling with him that he continues to favor establishing heavy-weapons exclusion zones around three Muslim enclaves in eastern Bosnia—Zepa, Srebrenica and Tuzla—like the zones declared around Sarajevo

and Gorazde. Although the Europeans rejected a U.S. attempt last month to use NATO air power to establish an exclusion zone around Bihac, Perry said he is "not giving up" on such a step "as an idea worth pursuing" to protect the remaining safe areas.

"I continue to have the view that in balancing the risks of invoking NATO air power versus the return benefits, that I still come out believing that the return benefits outweigh the risks involved," he said on his flight from Washington. "I do not minimize the risks or ignore them. I just say that I think that in balance, a strong show of power is more effective than not having any military power to demonstrate."

Mindful that a withdrawal of the U.N. force may still become necessary if conditions continue to deteriorate, NATO military planners continue to refine evacuation plans.

Perry said today that he had made clear in his discussions with Claes that such a withdrawal should be conducted under the sole command of NATO, not under the "dual key" rules between NATO and the United Nations governing other international military action in Bosnia.

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Britain Cool to French Plan To Step Up U.N. Bosnia Effort

By MICHAEL R. GORDON
Special to The New York Times

BRUSSELS, Dec. 13 — Britain today declined to endorse a French plan to strengthen the United Nations peacekeeping effort in Bosnia and Herzegovina, raising doubts about NATO's ability to forge a common position on the Bosnian crisis.

Defense Minister Malcolm Rifkin of Britain took a decidedly cool stand toward the plan after a meeting with Defense Secretary William J. Perry at the alliance's headquarters here.

"These ideas have to be analyzed and assessed," Mr. Rifkin told reporters. "You don't just announce an idea. You have to have it studied to see what the implications are. Can it

be done? Will it deliver the results that those that advocate it recommend?"

Under the French plan, which was disclosed Monday by Defense Minister François Léotard, United Nations peacekeepers would establish a protected ground corridor from the Adriatic to Sarajevo for aid supplies, redeploy their forces to provide better security for the Sarajevo airport so supplies could be safely flown in and shift their troops in other parts of Bosnia to more defensible positions.

Western diplomats said Mr. Rifkin

had been careful not to reject the French proposal out of hand in his meeting with Mr. Perry. Instead, the British Defense Minister suggested that the idea, and others, be studied by the United Nations, which has been reluctant to take a forceful stand against the Bosnian Serbs.

But Mr. Rifkin's remarks contrasted sharply with Mr. Perry's warm embrace of the French proposal, which Washington hopes will lend new credibility to United Nations peacekeeping efforts in Bosnia and dissuade the American Congress from ordering a unilateral lifting of the arms embargo against the Bosnian Government.

Mr. Perry told reporters en route to NATO headquarters that he hoped to win allied support for the French

plan. And NATO's Secretary General, Willy Claes, described the French ideas as "very constructive."

But after Mr. Perry's meeting with Mr. Rifkin, American officials said they did not expect a quick endorsement of the French plan.

The thorny discussions among Paris, Washington and London come against a backdrop of deteriorating conditions for United Nations peacekeepers in Bosnia and growing strains between NATO and the United Nations, which erupted into the open today.

In a forceful rebuttal to United Nations spokesmen, Mr. Claes publicly rejected assertions that the Western alliance was afraid to carry out air strikes against the Bosnian Serbs.

The issue of air strikes arose on Monday after Serbs from Croatia ambushed Bangladeshi peacekeep-

ers north of Bihac.

Though the Bangladeshis called for NATO warplanes to help protect them and one Bangladeshi died in the Serbian attack, senior United Nations commanders decided not to request air strikes or ask allied aircraft to fly over the area.

Seeking to justify their decision, United Nations spokesmen said NATO air attacks could not be launched because the Bosnian Serbs' surface-to-air missiles posed too great a threat to allied pilots.

But NATO officials rejected that account, saying that the alliance was ready to act and that the real reason air strikes or the buzzing of Serbian positions had not been requested was that the United Nations commanders were afraid that the Serbs would retaliate against their peacekeepers.

One NATO official, who spoke on condition that he not be named, said the United Nations command-

ers appeared to be concerned that the mere presence of allied planes in the skies near Bihac could lead to allied air strikes because the alliance had made it clear that it would attack Bosnian Serb surface-to-air missiles that threatened its aircraft.

Mr. Claes, for his part, told reporters that NATO stood ready to act if a United Nations request was made.

A senior American defense official said that the failure of the United Nations to call for air strikes in response to the Serbian attacks hurt the organization's credibility and that this was one reason for Washington's embrace of the French proposal.

American officials said Mr. Perry planned to press for a firmer stand by the United Nations peacekeeping force with other NATO members on Wednesday, despite the noncommittal response from the British.